

St. Thomas Catholic Church  
5 miles southwest of Bardstown and  
1-1/2 miles southeast of U. S. Route 31E  
Bardstown Vicinity  
Nelson County  
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-100

HABS  
KY  
90-BARTO.V.  
2-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. KY-100

## ST. THOMAS CATHOLIC CHURCH

HABS  
KY  
70-BARTON  
2-

Address: Bardstown vicinity, Nelson County, Kentucky.  
5 miles SW of Bardstown and 1-1/2 miles SE of U.S. Rt. 31E

Present Owner: Archdiocese of Louisville

Present Occupant: St. Thomas parish

Present Use: Catholic church

Brief Statement of Significance: The oldest existing Catholic church in Kentucky. It was designed by Maximilian Godefroy, famous Baltimore architect and was built on land donated by the prominent Howard family.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The land for the church was donated by Thomas Howard to Bishop Flaget; the church was named for the donor's patron saint. It then belonged to the Diocese of Bardstown; was used as a seminary chapel for St. Mary's Seminary, and as a temporary cathedral before the erection of St. Joseph's in Bardstown. (Rev. C. C. Boldrick). When the Diocese was superseded by the Archdiocese of Louisville, title passed to the Archdiocese, where it remains. J. H. Schauinger, Cathedrals in the Wilderness (Bruce Publishing Company, 1958).
2. Date of erection: The cornerstone was laid on August 23, 1813 and the church was finally consecrated by the Bishop on August 15, 1816. (Records in possession of Rev. C. C. Boldrick, 501 Cherrywood Road, Louisville, Kentucky).
3. Architect: Maximilian Godefroy of Baltimore. St. Thomas' is very similar to Godefroy's original design for St. Mary's in Baltimore. (Prof. R. Alexander, Pennsylvania State College, in a letter to C. C. Boldrick).
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: The builder was Mr. Rogers, a master carpenter, who later built St. Joseph's Cathedral in Bardstown. The bricks were made on the site by seminarians, while the other materials--stone, wood, etc. were promised and supplied by parishoners. (Rev. C. C. Boldrick).

5. Alterations: There is no record of any alterations prior to 1950. In 1950 some interior alterations were made; walls resurfaced (burlap over original plaster, plaster then applied to burlap); new linoleum floor; repainting. (Father Blanford, pastor of St. Thomas').

B. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Records of Bishop Flaget.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a one-story structure with brick bearing wall. The plan is the basic historical basilica layout. Notable is the lack of excessive Gothic detail, both inside and outside. The boat-shaped vault over the nave and sanctuary is similar to, but plainer than, that in St. Mary's in Baltimore. The front door is somewhat typical of well-to-do homes of the period and locality.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 50' x 72'
2. Foundations: Rough stone
3. Wall construction: Brick masonry, modified English bond (three stretcher courses, one header course). Pointed-arch niches flank main door.
4. Stoops: Concrete stoop at main door, natural stone steps in front of sacristies.
5. Chimneys: None
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main doorway surrounded by a shallow, pointed-arch recess in the brick has a semicircular fenlight leaded with clear glass of radial design, plain wooden pilasters; pointed arches with transoms into the sacristies; the double front doors and doors into the sacristies are six-panel.
  - b. Windows: Pointed arches with stained glass with casement section in nave; stained glass double hung sash in sacristies, rose window of concentric design on front.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hip, with semicircular cone over sanctuary apse; sheet metal sheathing.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Wood fascia board around eaves, concrete dentils and caps on front wall.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Nave, four bays long, no narthex, side aisles, apse sanctuary three steps higher than nave, altar in apse two steps higher (steps have cupid's bow profile); choir loft in rear bay over entrance; sacristies flank sanctuary in place of traditional transepts, have doors to sanctuary to nave, and to outside. Round cedar columns distinguishing side aisles from nave support choir loft and pointed arches, which in turn support vault.
2. Stairways: Stair is partly enclosed, to choir loft; square spindles, no newel post.
3. Flooring: Linoleum over original wood floor in nave; original wood floor in sanctuary and sacristies.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, original plaster on vault.
5. Doors: The doors between the sacristies and the nave are wood six-panel; doors between the sacristies and the sanctuary are two-panel.
6. Trim: Wood
7. Hardware: Recent
8. Lighting: Electric
9. Furniture: Baptismal font of reeded, urn shape with decorated lid, carved from single log by seminarian named Millet. Original tabernacle and altar also carved by him.
10. Heating: None

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Open farmland. The front faces north-northwest.
2. Surrounding buildings: Convent, rectory, school.
3. Walks: Concrete, blacktop.

Prepared by Charles C. Boldrick,  
Student Asst. Architect  
National Park Service  
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